JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-71

Key Verse 6:35 “Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two small fish. They all ate and were satisfied. Jesus’ disciples took 12 baskets of leftovers for their next meal. Then they took a boat to reach the other side of the lake while Jesus went up to a mountain to pray. In the middle of the lake the disciples met a storm, but Jesus came to rescue them walking on the water. Jesus encouraged the fearful disciples, saying, “*It’s I; don’t be afraid.*” When Jesus got into the boat, the boat immediately reached the shore where they were heading. Through this event we learned that we must fix our eyes on Jesus and hear his words in our time of suffering and danger. “*It is I; don’t be afraid, my children*.” “*Don’t worry, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*…” (Mt 6:33) Jesus cares for us as a loving mother cares for her children. Amen!

The people who had eaten the bread were searching for Jesus and his disciples. When they realized that Jesus and his disciples were gone, they went across the lake to seek Jesus. When they found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they asked him, **“*Rabbi, when did you get here****?*” (25) How did Jesus answer them? Look at verses 26-27. “***Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.***” Jesus challenged the crowd about their motivation in desperately searching for him. At first they came to Jesus to hear the word of God. But after they tasted the bread which Jesus had provided on the other side of the lake, their desire was changed from hearing the word of God to eating the bread. Verse 13 proves that they intended to come and make Jesus king by force. They wanted to make Jesus the ‘Burger King.’

Working for bread is not sinning or doing something wrong, though. We must work hard to make money and support our families. Paul said, “If you don’t work, you shall not eat.” John Calvin said that labor is sacred. We all need bread. Jesus provided bread for the hungry crowd and fed the Twelve. What Jesus wants to say here is a warning against materialism. Man is both body and soul. As our physical body demands bread for our physical needs, so our soul demands spiritual food for our spiritual needs. But we have the tendency to seek physical food more than spiritual food, because our physical needs seem to be more urgent than our spiritual needs. This is the reason why Satan tempts us with bread problems. Satan tempted even Jesus in this matter. He tempted Jesus, who had fasted for forty days and nights, saying, “*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.*” (Mt 4:3, Lk 4:3) Satan tempted Jesus to use his power to satisfy his physical needs more than God’s will for world salvation. Satan tried to distract Jesus from obeying the will of God. What did Jesus answer Satan? Jesus answered, “*It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*.’” (Mt 4:4, Lk 4:4) Jesus did not deny the necessity of bread for our physical body, but he warned about neglecting spiritual food, the word of God for our soul. Jesus cares for our physical needs. He fed the five thousand people. He also urged them not to neglect their spiritual food, the word of God, for their soul. We must work hard for physical food to support our family. We also must work hard for spiritual food which endures to eternal life. As we get up early in the morning to work, so we also must build an altar of prayer early every morning. As we work hard to get paid, so we also must work hard to expand God’s kingdom. Satan hates it when we do this. So Satan makes us busy doing work for bread only. It distracts us into neglecting our spiritual food until we become too tired to do anything for God or for world salvation. All our efforts for our physical body on this earth will spoil and perish. They do not last long. But all our effort, work, and tears for our eternal life will remain forever and will be credited to us in heaven. This is the reason why Jesus said that we must work for food that endures to eternal life.

I thank God for our members’ regular fishing and teaching. Some visit campuses two by two, meet students, and teach them the word of God. Others pray for God’s kingdom in their home, workplace, school, and church. All our labors for the Lord are not in vain. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said to his disciples who worried about what to eat and what to wear, “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well*.”

Look at verse 28. When they heard Jesus’ word about ‘*work*’, they asked him, “***What must we do to do the works God requires?***” According to the Jewish concept about salvation, they thought that they could be saved by doing something which pleases God. They must have been challenged by Jesus’ word which says, “…*work for food that endures to eternal life.*” Jesus answered in verse 29. “***Jesus answered, “The work of God is this; to believe in the one he has sent.***” Do you think that believing is a kind of work? We don’t consider believing as a work because it is not a visible action, but an invisible happening in our heart. But the Bible proves the importance and power of faith in doing the work of God. Hebrews 11 says that by faith people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, and by faith they conquered Jericho. Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, … and so on. (Heb 11:29-38) Jesus also said that if we have faith, we can move even mountains. (Mk 11:23) Some may lightly consider faith, saying, “Whether you believe Jesus or not is your choice. It is not a big deal.” But when we have faith, we can move even mountains. Above all, when we have faith in Jesus, we can cross over from death to life. (Jn 5:24) Our invisible decision for Jesus and our undetectable commitment to Christ are great works for our salvation and for our eternal life. This is reason why Jesus said, “*The work of God is to believe in the one he has sent*.”

Now the crowd was challenged by the word of Jesus, “*believe*”. So they asked Jesus, “***What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat***.” (30-31) They saw the miraculous sign which Jesus performed while they were eating the bread. Still, they were looking for more signs from Jesus before they could believe in him. How did Jesus answer them? Look at verses 32-33. “***Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.***” The people compared Jesus to Moses and sought more signs before they could believe in Jesus. Jesus taught them that it was not Moses but the Father God who gave manna to their ancestors in the desert. Jesus also taught them that he is much superior to Moses in providing bread from heaven, which gives life to the world. Moses fed millions in the desert for 40 years. Those who ate this manna all died. But Jesus feeds billions and billions of people throughout the whole world, not only for 40 years, but forever and ever. Those who eat the bread which Jesus brings will live forever.

The crowd must have been moved by Jesus’ words. So they asked Jesus, ***“Sir, always give us this bread***.” (34) This reminds us of the Samaritan woman who asked Jesus for the living water, *“Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.*” (Jn 4:15) How did Jesus answer them? Look at verse 35. “***Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty***.” Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus identified himself in several ways to fit special persons in specific occasions. Jesus said, “*I am the bread of life*” for the hungry souls. He said, “*I am the light of the world*” for an adulterous woman walking in the darkness of sin (Jn 8:12); “*I am the good shepherd*” for those who wandering without a shepherd (Jn 10:11); “*I am the resurrection and the life*” for Mary and Martha, who were weeping under the power of death (Jn 11:24); “*I am the way and the truth and the life*” for the Greeks who were seeking for truth (Jn 14:6); “*I am the vine*…” for those who want to bear the fruits of life through the Holy Spirit. (Jn 15:5)

Jesus said earlier in verse 27, “work for *food that endures to eternal life,* *which the Son of Man will give you.*” Here ‘food that endures to eternal life’ indicates Jesus himself. Jesus said that whoever comes to him will never go hungry and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. This is because Jesus provides us eternal life when we eat the bread of life. Jesus continued to say that he came down from heaven to give us eternal life and to raise us up at the last day. To find God’s sheep and to raise them up at the last day was God’s will which Jesus had to fulfill. (37-40) This is the purpose for which Jesus came down from heaven.

In this chapter Jesus repeated 6 times that he came down from heaven. So the Jews began to grumble about Jesus, who said, “***I am the bread that came down from heaven***.” (41) They saw Jesus as a son of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, who made furniture for them. (42) When they saw Jesus with their humanistic viewpoint, Jesus was a mere man. When people see our working for spiritual food with their materialistic viewpoint, our life of faith seems like just a waste of time. They are like the Israelites who ate manna and died without recognizing the significance of the spiritual secret of God’s blessing. In God’s eyes and with his spiritual viewpoint, our daily morning devotion, praise, worship, offerings, Bible readings, teaching, fishing, and visiting God’s sheep are us working for our spiritual food, Jesus, and are all works for our eternal life.

Jesus continued to say that he is the bread of life who came down from heaven. ***“I am the bread of life…(48) But here is the bread that comes down from heaven…(50) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (51)*** How then can we eat the bread of life, Jesus? Verse 52 says, “***The Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*** Jesus explained the meaning of eating the bread of life in verses 53-55. “***Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.***” Jesus added drinking his blood to eating his flesh for our eternal life. Jesus even said that his flesh is real food and his blood is real drink. From the human point of view, his words are so weird and horrifying. But from God’s point of view Jesus was talking about the gospel. Jesus predicted his suffering and crucifixion for the sins of the world. On the cross, Jesus’ flesh and bones would be torn apart and his blood would gush out from his body. His flesh would be given like broken bread and his blood would be poured out like a cup of wine as atonement for our sins. In the temple, the high priests killed a lamb without defect for the sins of his people. Then the meat was eaten and the blood was poured out as atonement for their sin. In the same way, Jesus would be slaughtered and sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins. This atoning sacrifice is God’s way for men to be forgiven and to have eternal life. Therefore, eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood means accepting the way of God’s salvation by believing in Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29)

Eating his flesh and drinking his blood has more significant meaning than just gaining salvation. It provides for our perfect union with Jesus. Look at verse 56. “***Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them***.” When we eat the bread of life and drink the blood of Jesus, we become one with Jesus. It symbolizes our perfect unity with Christ. We often participate in Holy Communion. Whenever we eat and drink, we remember that we are one with Jesus. He remains in us and we in him by our participating in the Holy Communion. The word ‘*Christian*’ means ‘a man in Christ.’ When we confess that Jesus is Christ and believes in him from our heart, we enter into his kingdom. We remain in Jesus and Jesus remains in us. We become one with him. As he rose again from the dead, we will also rise again. Jesus promised us our resurrection four times in this chapter, “*I will raise them up at the last day*.” (39,40,44,54) Repetition two times emphasizes his assurance. Repetition four times provides more than enough assurance of our eternal life. Amen!

How did Jesus’ disciples respond to Jesus’ words? In verse 60 they said, “***This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?***” They did not understand Jesus’ teaching because they did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God who came down from heaven. They followed Jesus, but their motivation was not the same as that of the Twelve. Jesus knew that they were offended by his teaching. Still, Jesus did not comfort them with human sympathy, but challenged them with a deeper spiritual secret. “***Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before***!” (61,62) Jesus predicted his ascension after his resurrection. Jesus continued to help them open their spiritual eyes to see him and to believe in him. Look at verse 63. “***The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you---they are full of the Spirit and life***.” Here, the Spirit means the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that we will receive the Holy Spirit when we eat the bread of life. We’ll receive the Holy Spirit when we believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit confirms our eternal life through whom we believe. The Holy Spirit also helps us to grow in Jesus and bear fruits of life as one of his branches. This does not mean that we ignore our flesh, but it means that we must work for food that endures to eternal life by the work of the Holy Spirit. We have prayed for spiritual revival in North America through the work of the Holy Spirit. Let us believe in the work of the Holy Spirit for the ISBC. Let us earnestly pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in the conference. Amen!

Verse 66 says that from that time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. This could have been a crisis for Jesus’ ministry. Many of his disciples left him. But Jesus didn’t mind their departure. He challenged the remaining Twelve with a question, “***You do not want to leave too, do you***?” (67) This was not Jesus’ despairing question for the Twelve to leave, but a compassionate and loving request for them to remain. Simon Peter answered him in verses 68-69. His answer was a significant confession paralleled to his confession of faith, “*You are the Christ*.” (Mt 16:16, Mk 8:29, Lk 9:20) Let us read verses 68-69. “***Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”*** Peter was a responsible fisherman, who worked hard to support his family. But he was not happy with living only for fish. His life was like an empty net after a night-long effort. Then he met Jesus and heard his words. *Don’t be afraid. From now on you will fish for people*.” (Lk 5:10) After that, Peter followed Jesus and saw what Jesus did and heard what Jesus taught. He desired the bread of life, Jesus. He understood the word of Jesus, “*The words I have spoken to you---they are full of the Spirit and life.*” So, he confessed, “*To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.*” Peter hadn’t see Jesus’ death and resurrection yet. He did not know what would happen to Jesus. But he believed in Jesus as the Son of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit for those who follow Jesus and work for food that endures to eternal life.

Jesus also warned Judas Iscariot, who would betray him for the sake of money. Judas, even though he followed Jesus for three years, did not work for food that endures to eternal life. When he followed his selfish ambition and money, he was tempted by Satan and ended his life in tragedy.

In today’s passage Jesus encourages us to work for food that endures to eternal life. The Spirit gives life, and flesh counts for nothing. Let us overcome our spiritual enemies, such as materialism, humanism, and fatalism, so that we may live victorious lives every day. Let the word of Jesus nourish our souls so that we may grow in his divine nature and heart. Amen! Let us read verse 35.